

ABSTRACTING INSTRUCTIONS

Learning how to write an abstract will provide you with a very useful skill. It will encourage you to read with questions in mind, it will help you to review previously read materials, it will prove worthwhile as a method of note-taking for your research paper. Your abstract will be much more useful to you than notes in the margin of your book, or underlining passages.

The purpose of an abstract is to permit the reader to decide whether the source being abstracted is important and relevant enough to be consulted in the original. Therefore, an abstract must include the author's (1) data collection, (2) analysis, and (3) evaluation and/or conclusion processes. From all three aspects, the crucial operations which represent the skeletal structure of the paper or book must be selected and reported. Thus, the reader is able to visualize the intellectual-operational processes used by the author. This means selection, and no avoidance of this is possible or desirable. To do this well, the abstracter must ask three basic questions:

- (1) What does the author do? What phenomena are studied? What hypotheses are formulated? What concepts, theories, ideas, notions, thoughts, or hunches are discussed?
- (2) How does the author do it? What data are used? What is their origin? Are they from primary or secondary sources? What methods are used for isolating, manipulating, and summarizing the data? Does the author use qualitative and/or quantitative methods? What tests, scales, indexes, etc., are used and what are the major distinctions or breaks? What concepts, definitions, typologies, or classification schemes are used? How, in other words, is analysis and/or synthesis accomplished?
- (3) What does the author conclude? Are the hypotheses, ideas, concepts, theories, etc., accepted or rejected? What conclusions are drawn? What relationships are found, confirmed or rejected? Briefly, what are the major findings?

IN SHORT: the abstract must be in such a form that the reader is able to determine what problem is investigated, how it is investigated, and what the conclusions are. It must give minimum substantive information from which the reader can infer the nature and the character of the investigation reported.

Do not use abbreviations in abstracts. An abstract should be between 200 and 300 words long. Typed abstracts are preferred; they should be double-spaced with 1 1/2 inch margin on the left and 1 inch margins on the other three sides. Each abstract should begin with a formal citation of the book or article that includes:

for a book: author, title, place of publication, publisher, date.

for an article: author, title, name of journal, volume number, date of publication, and page numbers.

Before turning in an abstracting assignment, you are responsible for proof-reading it for syntax, grammar, spelling, and punctuation. (Experienced writers re-read their copy several times before turning it in to their editors!)